(d) what steps have been taken by Government to expedite the process of payment of interest annually ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI SUKH RAM) : (a) The total no. of account holders in the Main PO and the Sub POs in Rampurhat Sub Division of West Bengal is 47000.

(b) The rate of interest paid on the PO savings account deposits in this Division as elsewhere in the country is 5½% p.a.

(c) and (d) The interest is paid on the lowest balance at credit of a savings account between the close of the 10th day and the end of the month and such interest is calculated and credited in savings account at the end of each year. The question of delayed payment of interest therefore does not arise.

Microwave Tower in the Districts of Ferozepore and Faridkot

1584. SHRI VIRENDRA KATARIA : Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is fact that there was a proposal to replace or strengthen the indigenous low frequency Microwave tower at Abohar in District Ferozepore and to install another tower at Gidderbaha in District Faridkot to check flactuations in STD and ISD service;

(b) if so, what measures have been taken to expedite the work; and

(c) what are the reasons that the authorities have not so far bothered to remove this genuine grievance of the consumers ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI SUKH RAM) : (a) Yes, Sir. The existing Microwave system is being replaced by a Digital Microwave system.

(b) and (c) The infrastructure for the new system has been completed. Equipment for the digital microwave system is expected to become available in 1993-94. On receipt of the equipment, this system will be commissioned.

New Telephone connections at Abohar

1585. SHRI VIRENDRA KATARIA : Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that the applications for new telephone connections at Abohar have not been attended to during the current financial year as the Electronic Exchange had exhausted its capacity;

(b) if so, what steps have been taken for the expansion of the said exchange; and

(c) what are the reasons that OYT seekers have not been given telephone connections in this fast growing industrial town ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI SUKH RAM) : (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) 5.5K Main E-10B stands allotted for the year 1993-94.

(c) Present exchange is fully loaded.

Opening of Telecommunication Network in Rural Areas to Private Sector

1586. DR. MURLI MANOHAR JOSHI : Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state :

(a) whether Government propose to open the area of rural tele-communication network to the Private Sector, and if so, what are the details thereof; and

(b) what is the estimated fund requirement for providing tele-communication facility to each village during the Eighth Five Year Plan together with the number of villages that will be provided telephone facilities during the current year ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI SUKH RAM) : (a) Yes Sir. The proposal is under consideration. DOT proposes to open the virgin rural areas for private sector participation. Details are being worked out.

(b) During Eighth Plan it is proposed to cover all 2,32,054 Panchayat Villages and another 1.5 lakh villages only for provision of public telephones. The funds requirement for this is estimated to be